

II. INTRODUCTION

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE OF THE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' mission includes providing a healthy, sustainable environment in which a full range of outdoor opportunities may be enjoyed. To that end, the department completed the Recreation Opportunities Analysis (ROA), a study to better understand:

- Existing outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Unmet demand for outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Which department-managed properties may be well-suited to address unmet demand.

The department owns and manages over 1.6 million acres of land on behalf of Wisconsin's citizens. These lands provide a wide range of recreation opportunities and a diversity of habitats throughout the state. These properties' ecological and recreation resources are managed according to management plans that are periodically updated. The department refers to these plans as "master plans." The information generated in the ROA will be used to assist the department in effectively managing properties to meet evolving needs and opportunities. Specifically, the department will use the results of the ROA to:

- Inform master planning processes for DNR-managed properties to ensure that our staff and financial resources are focused on providing the appropriate recreational opportunities in the appropriate places.
- Meet the requirements of state law (s. 23.116, Wis. Stats.) that directs the DNR to inventory, map, and determine which DNR roads are open to the public for use by motorized vehicles.

The goals of the Recreation Opportunities Analysis are to:

- Ensure that department resources are focused on providing desired recreational opportunities in the most appropriate places.
- Identify future recreational needs in each planning region and the department properties that are best suited to meet these demands.
- Provide information on the full spectrum of outdoor recreation in each region to the department's master planning process and provide information and guidance that enables the master planning process to identify which roads on department-managed properties should be open to motorized vehicles, in order to meet the requirements of new state law.
- Use the best available information to identify existing recreation opportunities and future needs in each region of the state.
- Ensure there is ample opportunity for public and stakeholder input.

REGIONS OF THE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

One of the first steps in the ROA process was to determine the right scale to gather and analyze information about recreation opportunities and needs. The department chose to use the same eight regions that were identified in the Wisconsin 2005-2010 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The regions are collections of counties that share similarities in their landscape features, tourism influences, and demographic characteristics. These eight regions were also recently used as the framework to gather data on residents' participation in outdoor recreation for the update to Wisconsin's SCORP.

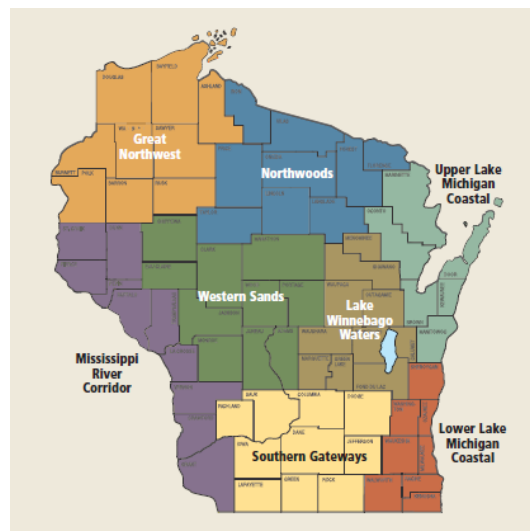
STATEWIDE STAKEHOLDER TEAM

The ROA describes and evaluates the existing recreation opportunities and needs in each of the eight regions across the state. To ensure that it successfully identifies these opportunities and needs, the department invited a collection of representatives from statewide recreation groups to provide guidance, information, and advice to the department as it proceeds through the development of the eight regional summaries. The members of this group, known as the Statewide Stakeholder Team, are listed in Appendix 4.

This group assisted the department in developing statewide recreation goals for the ROA, identifying characteristics and criteria that make for satisfying experiences, assessing compatibility between and among participants in different activities, and developing principles for successfully integrating recreation opportunities.

The Statewide Stakeholder Team helped create the following goals for use in the Recreation Opportunities Analysis. These goals are intended to establish a broad framework and context for the department as it seeks to understand current and future recreation needs and how best to meet them. The department seeks to continue working with other recreation providers and advocacy groups to help meet these goals.

1. Provide residents and visitors with a diverse range of high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities.
 - a. Provide quality recreation opportunities in all regions of the state.
 - b. Coordinate and integrate recreation opportunities across different levels of government and private enterprises to enhance participants' experiences.
 - c. Combine recreation activities if they can coexist with tolerable conflict and where management costs are reduced.
 - d. Separate recreation activities in time or space where needed to improve participants' experiences and minimize conflicts.
2. Provide recreation opportunities that are tailored to local conditions and supported by the public.
 - a. Leverage the unique qualities, features, and existing infrastructure in different regions of the state.
 - b. Ensure that recreation opportunities are provided that are consistent with demand and are supported by regional residents.
3. Increase Wisconsin residents' participation in outdoor recreation activities.
 - a. Broaden the diversity of Wisconsin residents participating in outdoor recreation by providing high-quality opportunities for groups that have historically had limited access (e.g., low-income, disabled, elderly, and inner-city residents).
 - b. Increase the breadth of recreation activities in which individuals participate as a means to both educate residents about the issues and benefits associated with different activities and identify ways to improve compatibility among recreational uses of public properties.



- c. Describe the health and wellness benefits that participants receive, as well as the associated savings in health care costs that accrue to individuals and society.
 - d. Promote the economic benefits that accrue to local communities and the state from residents and visitors participating in outdoor recreation.
- 4. Develop adequate and stable funding sources for managing recreation facilities and lands.
 - a. Broaden the funding sources that support property and facility management, including visitors to public lands regardless of the activities in which they participate.
 - b. Develop creative techniques to fund different aspects of recreation facility and land management, including developing partnerships with non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, local business interests and private enterprises, and others.
 - c. Balance funding between users of public lands and general revenue sources.

The Statewide Stakeholder Team also helped develop a set of principles to guide cooperative efforts to meet recreation needs throughout the state. These guiding principles are:

- 1. Respect each other – we’re all in this together.
- 2. Remember, it’s public land – be tolerant of others.
- 3. Be willing to understand other’s interests and needs.
- 4. It’s not possible to have everything for everyone, everywhere.
- 5. Maximize shared recreation use at an acceptable experience level.
- 6. Look for ways to minimize the impact of your activity on others.
- 7. Increase all communication efforts by all to help notify and educate.
- 8. Be part of the solution!

ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN THE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

The intent of the ROA is to analyze opportunities for the spectrum of outdoor recreation, with a focus on those activities that department lands currently provide opportunities or potentially could provide opportunities for under the right circumstances.

Based on input from the Statewide Stakeholder Team, the 44 outdoor recreation activities listed at right are included in this analysis. This list does not limit the activities considered in the department's master planning process. Brief factsheets for these activities, including descriptions, facilities or conditions needed for satisfying experiences, and participation information, are included in Appendix 1.

There are several other outdoor recreation activities that occasionally occur on department properties, yet are not identified here for consideration in the ROA. However, the SCORP does include a statewide perspective on these activities in its analysis. Some of those activities not included in the ROA are alpine skiing, disc golf, dog parks, golf, playgrounds and a variety of outdoor games. In instances like golf and alpine skiing, concessionaires (vendor or business that sells a product or service) manage and operate the lands where these facilities are located. These arrangements are typically handled through lease agreements or contracts with the department. While these unique situations create popular destinations for people, these activities were determined to not be key components for department properties for the purpose for the regionally-focused ROA. Lastly, as mentioned above, them not being included in the list to the right does not limit their consideration in a property's master planning process.

Recreation activities included in the ROA

Upland, warm-weather activities

Non-motorized trail activities

- Bicycling - bicycle touring/road riding
- Bicycling - mountain biking/off-road biking
- Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking
- Horse cart driving
- Horseback riding

Motorized trail activities

- ATV/UTV riding
- 4-wheel vehicle driving
- Off-highway motorcycle riding

Other activities

- Bird or wildlife watching
- Camping - developed (modern)
- Camping - primitive
- Dog training
- Dog trialing
- Dog walking
- Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.
- Geocaching
- Hunting - big game
- Hunting - migratory birds
- Hunting - small game
- Hunting - turkey
- Nature photography
- Participating in nature-based education programs
- Picnicking
- Rock climbing
- Target shooting - archery
- Target shooting - firearms
- Trapping

Winter activities

- Bicycling - fat tire/snow biking
- Cross country skiing
- Dog sledding/skijoring
- Fishing - ice fishing
- Snowmobiling
- Snowshoeing

Water activities

- Canoeing or kayaking
- Fishing - lake fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak
- Fishing - lake fishing from shore or a pier
- Fishing - river fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak
- Fishing - stream or river fishing from shore or wading
- Motorboating (including waterskiing/tubing, riding personal watercraft)
- Sailing, windsurfing, rowing, stand-up paddling
- Scuba diving/snorkeling
- Swimming in lakes and rivers
- Visiting a beach, beach walking
- Whitewater rafting

RECREATION PARTICIPATION AND FREQUENCY BY WISCONSIN RESIDENTS

The department gathered recreation participation and frequency data across the state as part of the update to the Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). A survey was administered in 2016 using two techniques designed to complement each other; a hardcopy survey mailed to 6,400 random mailing addresses distributed across eight regions (800 surveys per region) and an online survey sent to panelists recruited by a third-party firm to represent the state adult population. The adjusted response rate for the postal survey was 46% and the department capped the online panelists at 1,000 responses.

Wisconsin residents' participation and frequency was assessed in sixty-five different outdoor activities, which include many that are not part of the ROA nor for which the department provides opportunities. The SCORP is, by design, a state plan covering issues of interest to a wide variety of public and private recreation providers. As such, it addresses a wider range of outdoor activities than those occurring on department-managed lands.

The top thirty activities for participation and frequency identified in the SCORP survey are seen in the tables below. The frequency values listed are mean scores of ordinal responses from 1 to 5, representing participation over the last 12 months as follows: 1 = 0 days, 2 = 1-2 days, 3 = 3-9 days, 4 = 10-29 days, and 5 = 30+ days. Thus, a mean score of 1 indicates no participation or zero days. Higher averages (closer to five) indicate activities in which residents participate frequently. **It is important to remember that average scores that are presented for recreation frequency are not measures of average days of participation.**

Recreation activities with the highest participation rates by Wisconsin residents.

Recreation Activity	Participation Rate (%)
Walking/running on sidewalks/roads	81
Picnicking/tailgating/cookout	74
Driving for pleasure	73
Attending outdoor festival or music event	69
Hiking/walking/running on trails	68
Visit a beach/beach walking	65
Attending outdoor sporting event	64
Visiting a historic site	57
Bird/wildlife watching at home	55
Swimming in lakes/ponds/rivers	54
Visiting a nature center	52
Bicycling on roads	48
Taking kids to playground	47
Motor boating (including pontoon boats)	45
Lake fishing from shore or a pier	40
Bird/wildlife watching away from home	39
Lake fishing from a boat/canoe/kayak	37
Nature photography	37
Swimming in outdoor community pools	36
Bicycling on rail trails/developed trails	34
Canoeing or kayaking	34
Golf	32
Tent camping	32
Walking/running dog on trails	32
Gathering berries, mushrooms, etc.	31
Target firearms shooting outdoors	29
Ice fishing	23
Visiting a dog park	23
Hunting big game on private land	21
RV/Pop-up camping	21

Recreation activities with the highest frequency rates by Wisconsin residents.

Recreation Activity	Participation Frequency
Walking/running on sidewalks/roads	3.54
Driving for pleasure	2.88
Hiking/walking/running on trails	2.62
Bird/wildlife watching at home	2.60
Picnicking/tailgating/cookout	2.60
Visit a beach/beach walking	2.32
Attending outdoor sporting event	2.24
Bicycling on roads	2.23
Attending outdoor festival or music event	2.19
Swimming in lakes/ponds/rivers	2.14
Taking kids to playground	2.13
Motor boating (including pontoon boats)	1.96
Visiting a historic site	1.89
Bird/wildlife watching away from home	1.85
Lake fishing from a boat/canoe/kayak	1.82
Visiting a nature center	1.81
Lake fishing from shore or a pier	1.80
Bicycling on rail trails/developed trails	1.78
Nature photography	1.77
Walking/running dog on trails	1.77
Swimming in outdoor community pools	1.70
Golf	1.68
Canoeing or kayaking	1.65
Target firearms shooting outdoors	1.61
Tent camping	1.55
Gathering berries, mushrooms, etc.	1.53
Visiting a dog park	1.50
Hunting big game on <u>private</u> land	1.49
Ice fishing	1.47
Target archery outdoors	1.45

COMPATIBILITY WITHIN AND BETWEEN RECREATION ACTIVITIES

A key component of successfully integrating different recreation activities at a property requires understanding how participants in the wide range of activities that occur on public lands in Wisconsin interact with each other. Many factors are part of how people view compatibility and how they react when they feel they have been disturbed or inconvenienced.

As described in the 2005-2010 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan,¹ people pursuing recreation activities can sometimes conflict with others engaged in the same activity or people engaged in other activities. For example, hunters pursuing the same game in the same place can conflict with each other. Similarly, horseback riders can conflict with, and be adversely impacted by, bicyclists using the same trail.

People participating in different recreation activities can have asymmetric impacts on each other. Asymmetric impacts occur when participants in one activity disrupt participants in another activity more than they are disrupted by that activity. An example of an asymmetric impact is the interaction between anglers and water-skiers using the same part of a lake; the water-skier may be affected to a small degree by the angler, but the angler may be substantially impacted by the water-skier.

Compatibility is often influenced by the volume of use and interactions. When use levels are low, there are often few, if any, direct interactions. In situations where use levels are low, even participants in activities that typically are not compatible can enjoy satisfying experiences in the same place at the same time. Many people in these situations, although they may feel disturbed for brief times during interactions, overall still have positive experiences. When use levels rise high enough, interactions can become unacceptable to users.

Finally, compatibility can be influenced simply by the tolerance level of participants. When people approach interactions with a perspective of tolerance, it is easier to not be upset by interactions with others. It is also easier to appreciate efforts that others may take to reduce their potential impacts (such as reducing their speed on a trail or moving to a different stretch of a stream for fishing). People that participate in a diversity of activities and understand the needs, limitations, and desired experiences of many outdoor enthusiasts are often more tolerant of multiple activities occurring in the same property or place.

A table of compatibility that was developed by the Statewide Stakeholder Team can be found in Appendix 2.

GATHERING INFORMATION ON EXISTING RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

The department maintains a comprehensive geographically-referenced database of lands owned by federal, state, and county governments that are open to the public for outdoor recreation. These lands provide recreational opportunities ranging from “wilderness” settings without trails or other recreation amenities to highly developed campgrounds with flush toilets and hot showers. This database contains information on conservation and recreation lands in Wisconsin owned by all federal agencies, the State (DNR and the Board of Commissioners of Public Land), and lands owned by counties that are enrolled in the County Forest program.

In addition to this information, the department collected data on existing recreation facilities (e.g., campgrounds, motorized and non-motorized trails, and boat launches) from various sources for the ROA. This inventory of existing facilities is not designed to be comprehensive or complete but rather is intended to provide a general overview of the opportunities available and the gaps that may exist. The accuracy of the data provided, especially for the trails, is continuing to be assessed. Tallying existing recreation facilities is helpful in understanding the relative supply across different regions of the state, but what residents want more of, and in what parts of the state, is most relevant in assessing the adequacy of existing facilities to meet demand.

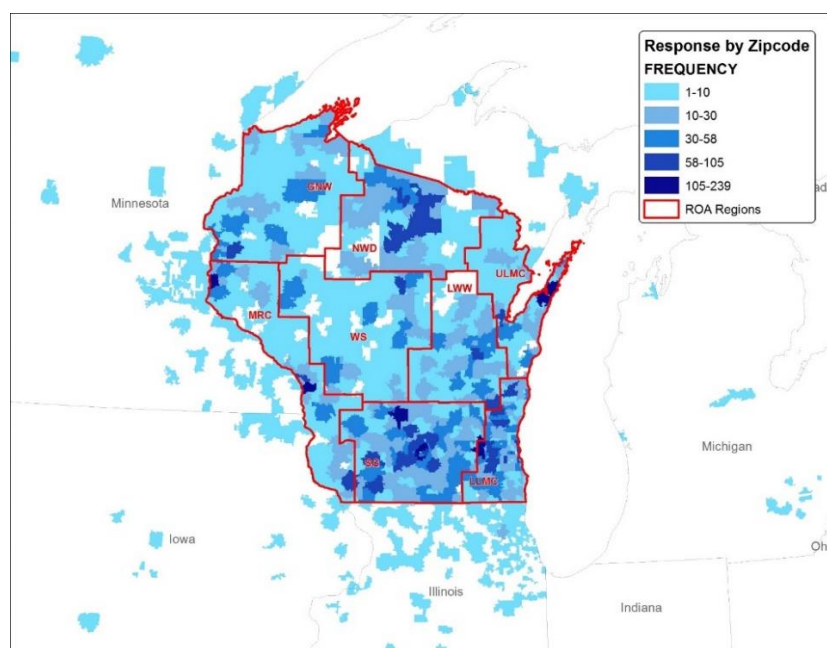
¹ See http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/planning/scorp/pdfs/wis_2005-10_scorp_complete.pdf

GATHERING PUBLIC INPUT

A central tenant of the ROA process is to gather information and perspectives from the public on the places they enjoy visiting and the recreation opportunities and experiences they would like more of in each region of the state. The department developed a public involvement process for the ROA that incorporated: (1) informing the public about their opportunities to be involved in different steps of the process, (2) multiple methods and venues to collect public input, and (3) development of maps and materials to initiate public input.

The department received many comments from people interested in a wide range of outdoor activities on the recreational opportunities - existing and desired - in each region. Input received supporting particular points of view are not counted as votes with the “winning” viewpoint selected. Rather, the department’s approach to analyzing the input received is to carefully read through all the comments and material presented to find common ideas and issues. The department’s goal is to identify the range of public reactions and perspectives, the reasoning behind these stances, and the general themes. If someone advocates for a particular recreational activity, the department is interested in knowing why. What motivates that perspective? Conversely, what is behind an opposition to a recreational use; what is the root of the concern?

The department received information from the public in various ways. In addition to the face-to-face communication at open-house meetings, an online questionnaire was available to obtain some key pieces of information needed to complete the analysis. Across the state, there were over 15,100 respondents to the request for public input. While most people providing input reside in Wisconsin, there were several who participated from across the United States. Of those who provided their location of residence, the map below shows their distribution and frequency in and around Wisconsin.



EXISTING RECREATION PLANNING EFFORTS AND HOW THEY RELATE TO THE ROA

STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

States are required to complete SCORPs every five years to be eligible to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program. SCORPs evaluate outdoor recreation trends and issues of statewide importance and set forth ideas about recreation’s future role in the state. There are several required elements for SCORPs, including identifying priorities for applying LWCF funds. The department is currently developing the next iteration of the Wisconsin SCORP which will cover the period from 2017 to 2022.

While SCORPs bring together a range of information on outdoor recreation in Wisconsin, they are not intended to provide guidance at a site or project level, nor do they attempt to address all the issues facing the state's recreation delivery system. Rather, SCORPs identify general outdoor recreation participation patterns and trends, issues and opportunities, and provide recommendations for future steps. Collaborative planning at local and regional scales, ongoing research on issues affecting recreation supply and demand, and cooperative implementation of policies and programs by governments, businesses, health care providers, community organizations, and others will continue to be essential in complementing the priorities described in the SCORP in order to meet the full spectrum of our future outdoor recreation needs.

The ROA will be incorporated into the broader SCORP effort. The ROA results will comprise a critical component of the description of recreation supply in each region of the state and future needs. These needs can also help inform future funding priorities for LWCF in Wisconsin.

DNR PROPERTY PLANNING

The department develops management plans (known as "master plans") for the properties that it owns and manages. A master plan establishes the level and type of public uses permitted at a property. The plan describes the authorized resource management along with the amount and type of facility development. It also acts as a blueprint for the property, providing for consistent, long term management, regardless of personnel changes. The planning process is described in Administrative Code NR 44.

The ROA identifies department-managed properties that appear potentially well-suited to help meet existing gaps in recreation opportunities. Many partner groups and land-owning agencies at all levels of government have important roles in meeting future recreation needs. In many cases the department may not be able to provide, or may not be the best entity to provide, certain recreation experiences. The recommendations offered in the ROA inform the master planning process in the context of relevant ecological landscape master plans. Considering the ecosystem management opportunities, recreation opportunities, and partner relationships with nearby public land managers will help focus and distribute compatible management strategies among department program lands.

The department is required to determine which roads on properties it manages will be open to motorized vehicles. Decisions related to determining which roads are open to which types of vehicles will continue to be integrated into the property master planning process.

a) Planning for motorized access on department-managed lands

State law (s. 23.116, Wis. Stats.) directs the department to inventory, map, and determine which roads on department -managed lands are open to the public for use by motorized vehicles. The department maintains a network of approximately 1,800 miles of roads for public use on properties it manages throughout the state. In addition, about 2,600 miles of service roads are maintained that provide access by department staff managing properties. Service roads are typically maintained to a lower standard than those open to the public.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

The LWCF was enacted by Congress in 1965 "to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States" through the acquisition and development of outdoor recreation resources and facilities. Using revenues primarily from offshore oil and gas leases, the intent of the LWCF is to provide funds for the acquisition and development of public lands to meet the outdoor recreation needs of all Americans. Generally, the funds that are available are divided between the "federal side" and the "state side" of the program. The federal land management agencies (National Park Service, National Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish & Wildlife Service) use the federal-side funds to acquire critical lands. The state side, which is administered by the National Park Service, provides matching grants to state, local and tribal governments to create and expand parks, develop recreation facilities, and further recreation plans. Funds are distributed to every U.S. state and territory using a formula that primarily is based on population.

These roads vary in their surfaces (from paved to gravel to native soils), width, permanence, and the nature of public access (open, seasonally open, closed). The department has completed mapping all the roads it maintains along with associated attribute data. Some characteristics of the roads that the department maintains are shown in the charts at right.

Department-managed roads open to the public are legally considered to be “highways of the state” and are subject to the same rules and regulations as other public roads. Wisconsin law states that only registered street-legal vehicles (those with head and brake lights, turn signals, and other safety features) are allowed on public roads, unless the controlling authority allows use by other vehicles (ATVs, UTVs, or off-highway motorcycles) under existing state laws that allow such designation. When public roads are designated for use also by recreational motorized vehicles, they are typically known as routes. About 120 miles of roads on department-managed lands allow ATV use and are classified as ATV routes.

Increasingly, town governments are opening some or all town roads to vehicles such as ATVs and UTVs. In limited situations, some counties are also allowing these vehicles on county roads. As a result, there are more opportunities to use department-managed roads to connect larger regional networks of motorized recreational vehicles.

The department developed guidance in December 2015 for evaluating and determining when it is appropriate to integrate motorized use on department roads.² Two key goals of the guidance are to provide opportunities for motorized access: (1) within department properties where it is appropriate, intended and publicly supported and (2) across department properties that provide critical linkages in larger regional trail networks.

When determining which roads are appropriate to open to different types of motorized vehicle access (e.g., street-legal vehicles, ATVs, UTVs, and/or off-road motorcycles), the guidance recognizes the following factors:

- Seasons of the year and under what developed conditions
- Environmental factors
- Input from the public and partner groups
- The public’s desire to access and enjoy department lands using appropriate motorized or non-motorized means.

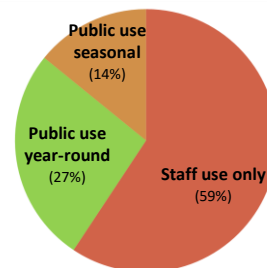
b) Relationship between the ROA and motorized access

The ROA study will provide region-based information useful in determining which roads should be open for different types of motorized vehicles and uses. This information will include social demands and

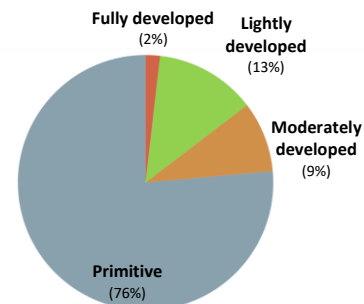
Characteristics of DNR-managed roads

(4,380 miles)

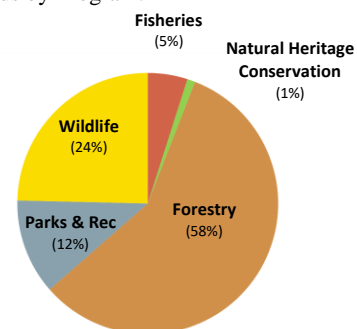
Current public and staff roads:



Development level of roads:



DNR roads by Program:



² See <http://dnr.wi.gov/news/input/documents/guidance/RoadGuidanceFinal.pdf>

perspectives as well as existing opportunities and their geographic context. The selection of roads on department-managed properties to be open for motorized access will be determined during the master planning process.

NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL PLANNING

There are two federally designated National Scenic Trails in Wisconsin—the North Country Trail and the Ice Age Trail. Additionally, the Ice Age Trail is designated as a State Scenic Trail. These trails are paths, designated for foot travel only. In limited cases, other long-standing recreational uses like biking and snowmobiling uses coincide with hiking on parts of these trails, mostly along rail-to-trail corridors. The purpose of the Ice Age and North Country Trails is to enable people to experience the unique scenic and cultural values of the state. The Ice Age Trail follows the extent of ancient glaciers, showcasing spectacular examples of geology related to glaciation in Wisconsin. The North Country Trail meanders through the variety of northern landscapes, linking scenic, natural, historic and cultural areas in seven states from New York to North Dakota.

The Ice Age and North Country National Scenic Trails are successful due in part to the partnerships between the department, National Park Service, local units of government, and the respective non-profit organizations associated with each trail—principally, the Ice Age Trail Alliance and North Country Trail Association. These “Trail Partners” work together to identify trail planning corridors, select specific properties (public or private) on which to locate the trail, and secure land rights from willing sellers. The Ice Age Trail Alliance and the North Country Trail Association each contribute private funding and enlist the help of thousands of volunteers to build, maintain and manage segments of the trails.

The Ice Age Trail and North Country Trail each span multiple regions of this ROA study. Planning for these long, linear trails varies somewhat from the typical property planning completed by the department. The reason for this variation is that the trails traverse many types of property ownership that the department does not control. These include private lands, county and local government lands, federal lands as well as other state lands. All land rights acquired for the Ice Age and North Country Trails are only from willing landowners—no one is forced to accommodate the trails. In cases where the trail has not yet been established, trail users walk along public roads to make connections to the next established section of trail. The trail corridor plan is prepared jointly by the department and the National Park Service.

FEDERAL LANDS PLANNING

Multiple branches of the federal government, including the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, own and manage public lands that are open to outdoor recreation. In their respective planning processes, outdoor recreation is a component to their plans where it is appropriate. Federal lands planning processes typically include public participation processes prior to finalizing land management plans.

COUNTY AND LOCAL RECREATION PLANNING

Many counties across the state have undertaken some form of planning for outdoor recreation. Those with county forests typically plan for a range of outdoor opportunities. Counties, townships and municipalities with parks and trails generally need to have recreation plans in place in order to compete for grants that fund recreation infrastructure developments and improvements.

ACTIVITY SPECIFIC PLANNING

Over the years, different agencies, groups, and organizations have undertaken planning projects focused on specific recreation activities. Examples include plans developed by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Horse Council, Wisconsin Bike Fed, and others.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES ON DEPARTMENT-MANAGED PROPERTIES TO MEET DEMANDS

The ROA provides the department an assessment of its current recreation offerings in different regions of the state and identifies situations where adjustments or enhancements in recreation management goals may be considered. However, there are some caveats. First, department-managed lands are just one potential solution to address gaps in existing recreation needs. Other public lands, non-profit organizations, and private businesses can also play important roles in meeting these needs. Indeed, these partners may be able to provide superior experiences for some needs and thus it may not be appropriate for the department to address some needs on properties it manages. Second, the department simply may not manage any lands in the region that would provide satisfying experiences for people wanting certain recreation opportunities. Third, in addition to the named properties familiar to most residents, the department manages many parcels scattered throughout the state. Although most of these are relatively small, they do provide opportunities to support some types of recreation or provide links in larger regional motorized and non-motorized trail networks.

The ROA is designed to analyze existing recreation opportunities in each region of the state, identify important future needs, and determine the department-managed lands that appear potentially well-suited to meet these demands. **To be clear, no changes to approved recreational uses on department properties will be immediately implemented as a result of the ROA.** The actual recreation uses and supporting infrastructure that occur at these properties (and where they will be located) will be determined and approved through the department's master planning process. The planning process will take into account properties identified in the ROA that appear well-suited for certain recreational uses, then further investigate the feasibility of that use on the property. If this investigation confirms a use's merit on the property, alternatives including these uses will be developed for which the public can review and provide feedback to the department. Only after the department completes the planning process and the Natural Resources Board approves the plan, will new recreational uses be allowed on department properties.

Many factors go into determining which department properties may present opportunities to add or enhance recreation offerings. These factors include:

- Statutory restrictions and requirements

The department is authorized to acquire and manage lands under specific legislative direction for specific conservation and recreation purposes. These authorities are described in Wis. Stat. Chapters 23, 27 and 28, and NR 1, Wis. Adm. Code.

In most cases, these authorities designate primary purposes for property types, but allow a wide range of recreation activities so long as these uses do not substantially detract from the primary purposes for which the property was acquired. Almost all department owned lands are open to public fishing, hunting, trapping, and hiking.

Additionally, Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 1.51 provides direction on the management of State Wildlife Areas. This guidance states that "wildlife habitat needs and public hunting objectives shall receive major consideration in management planning for wildlife areas; however fishery, forestry, wild resource and outdoor recreational objectives will be accommodated when they are compatible and do not detract significantly from the primary objective".

- Funding sources and associated restrictions

Based on public interests and demands, the state has been purchasing conservation and recreation lands for over 100 years. In some cases, the funding sources used to pay for acquisitions come with restrictions. For example, many fish and wildlife properties purchased in the 1940s through the 1960s used federal money generated from excise taxes on firearms and ammunition, fishing rods and tackle, and other hunting and fishing-related equipment. Federal guidelines require that lands acquired using these funds be used for hunting and fishing.

Secondary recreational uses of federal funded parcels of land may be allowed only if these secondary uses do not interfere with the authorized purpose of the grant, as determined by the DNR and in accordance with state laws, federal authorizing legislation, and 2 CFR 200.

- **Existing uses**

Most department-managed properties have long histories and established use and visitation patterns.

Maintaining the high-quality experience of existing uses is important and the department seeks to maintain and enhance these experiences. Equally important is ensuring that the department understands and adapts to the evolving social requests and needs. Just as it is imperative to avoid attempting to provide a full spectrum of recreation opportunities on each property, it is also critical to look at the department's entire portfolio of properties in the region and identify those places where it is most appropriate to meet today's and tomorrow's recreation needs. In some cases, this may require the department to stop providing some opportunities at a property and instead provide it elsewhere. Or, it may be appropriate to include a new use at a property because it is well-suited to provide a high-quality experience, even if doing so will result in some existing uses being somewhat diminished.

- **Physical and social attributes**

Many portions of department-managed properties are not well suited for some types of public use. Over 30% of department-managed properties are classified as wetland; other areas have steep slopes, rock outcroppings, and other features that limit their suitability to support recreation facilities.

Similarly, there are many portions of department-managed properties that are designed to provide specific settings or conditions where many types of recreation would be inappropriate. For example, high-quality ecological sites or areas intended to provide remote character would be inappropriate to provide many types of recreation. Also, existing recreational patterns, notably high use areas such as campgrounds, require compatible settings and surrounding uses.

- **Landscape context – opportunities elsewhere in the region, connections**

Each property's setting or landscape context plays an important role in determining practical and appropriate recreation activities to provide. Existing and planned opportunities at other nearby properties can influence the need for additional opportunities at department properties. Nearby opportunities can also create options to use department lands to connect or link regional networks. Surrounding land uses, population distribution, transportation networks, and other factors also influence opportunities to incorporate different activities on department-managed lands.

- **Social needs and requests**

The desire by stakeholders, such as local residents, to add or enhance recreation opportunities, either for their use or to meet the needs of visitors to the region, are critical components of determining appropriate recreation offerings at department-managed properties. Outdoor recreation, provided by the department and others, is a key economic benefit for many communities.

GROUPING OPPORTUNITIES FOR POTENTIAL FUTURE RECREATION

This analysis is a study of potential opportunities for outdoor recreation. **There is no priority or value measured for any one type of recreation activity by the department.** This study simply looks at what is available, what might be missing, and where future opportunities might be considering the landscape.

For each region of the state, the department sorted recreation activities into “High,” “Medium”, and “Low” groupings. These groupings were determined using the public input received during the public input opportunity, information obtained from the surveys conducted in preparation for the next edition of the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)³, and results from previous SCORP planning efforts. The department also considered the region’s landscape and its capability meet the needs of particular recreation activities.

The “High” grouping represents the activities where there appears to be the most unmet demand alongside a likelihood to meet the demand. For the purposes of the ROA, only activities listed in the “High” grouping were provided recommendations of potential department properties that might be able to address needs. Those activities in the “Medium” and “Low” groupings still have potential to be addressed in the regions, just possibly to a lesser degree. While the results of the ROA are not intended to limit consideration of particular activities on certain lands, they are intended to inform and streamline the department’s master planning process. By identifying the department-managed properties that are potentially well-suited to meet recreation needs, the results of the ROA will allow department staff and the public to focus on the subset of recreation opportunities needed in the region that the property can meaningfully address.

³ The questions for the SCORP surveys were focused on what people thought about outdoor recreation only in their home county. In contrast, people participating in the ROA input process could provide their thoughts about recreation in any region of the state by their own choosing.

